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A Front-Row Seat to the Development of Grounded Theory: An Interview with Odis Simmons

Kara L. Vander Linden, EdD
Glaser Center for Grounded Theory, Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies
Odis E. Simmons, PhD
Glaser Center for Grounded Theory, Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies

Abstract

Dr. Kara Vander Linden conducted this interview with Dr. Odis Simmons for the 2024 International Virtual Conference for Qualitative Research and Theory Methodologies. In this interview, Dr. Odis Simmons described what it was like to be a student of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss at the University of California, San Francisco. He explains how his friendship with Glaser and Strauss gave him a front-row seat to the development of grounded theory. Dr. Simmons also shared information about a shift Barney Glaser made in the meaning and development of substantive grounded theory that has never been previously shared. This interview has been edited for clarity and readability.

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Kara: Hi, my name is Dr. Kara Vander Linden. I'm the founder and director of the Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies, including the Glaser Center for Grounded Theory. Today, I will share a discussion with Dr. Odis Simmons, who told us what it was like to be a student of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss at the University of California, San Francisco. His friendship with Glaser and Strauss gave him a front-row seat to the development of grounded theory. Dr. Simmons will also share with us some information about the development of grounded theory that, as far as we know, has never been previously shared. I hope you enjoy it!

Odis, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. I want to introduce you to our listeners. Dr. Odis Simmons is the person I learned grounded theory from about 20-plus years ago. He was a student of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. He's been doing and teaching grounded theory for over 50 years and is probably the most experienced grounded theorist in the world at this time.

So, Odis, you are one of the few people left in the world who learned grounded theory directly from Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss right after they published their *Discovery* book. I know that you also developed a lifelong friendship with Barney Glaser and his family. Can you briefly tell us about how you discovered grounded theory and what it was like to learn grounded theory from Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss?

Odis: Yeah, I actually discovered grounded theory when the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book was first published in 1967. I was an undergraduate student at Sonoma State College, which is now a university and is where Kathy Charmaz (another grounded theorist, integral in constructivist grounded theory) spent her career as faculty. I was just browsing through the bookstore. I spent a lot of time browsing in the bookstore and the library. I've always

loved libraries and bookstores. Anyway, I saw this book, *Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The title looked interesting. I picked it up and started thumbing through it, and I thought, boy, that looks interesting. So, I bought it.

As I began to read, now you must understand that I didn't know much about methodology and, in fact, knew very, very little about methodology, and as I read it, I thought, you mean that isn't the way it's always done. I was amazed, you know, amazed that Glaser and Strauss were writing about how, in their methodology, the data comes first and then the theory. At the time, I was trying to decide what I wanted to major in, and that book, you know, sealed the deal for me.

Then, sometime later, I was taking a class. I took several classes from John Lofland, who was on the faculty at the time. He's now [professor] emeritus at UC Davis. He was a symbolic interactionist; in fact, all but one of the faculty members of San Francisco received their degrees from UC Berkeley. Herbert Bloomer was the chair of sociology at UC Berkeley, and he was the one who coined the phrase symbolic interaction.

Lofland was a student of George Herbert Mead, whose work led to the symbolic actionist perspective. And I might mention, Mead didn't have a PhD, nor did he ever publish anything. He has books, but these books were his notes put together by his students. They put them together. He would not even get a job in today's academic world, which would have changed the history of sociology. So, I was very well-versed in symbolic interactionism by the time I left [Sonoma State College].

John Lofland has been a very successful symbolic interactionist. And in a casual conversation, I mentioned to him that I really liked the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book by Glaser and Strauss. And he said, "Oh, well, you know, Glaser and Strauss have developed a new

program at UCSF and my wife is in the first cohort." Lynn Lofland was her name. She was a very nice person and another very well-accomplished symbolic interactionist. And so, I thought, "Boy, I want to study under these guys."

The next year, I applied to the new program at UCSF, but they selected their students earlier than most universities, so they didn't have to compete with the more established departments, and they'd already selected their students.

So, another one of my early mentors, Stanford Lyman, was leaving Sonoma State and going to the social psychology program at the University of Nevada, Reno. And he said, "Follow me up there." So, I spent a year there, and then I reapplied at UCSF and got in. I started at UCSF in 1970, which was three years after the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book had come out. I was in the third cohort. Charmaz was in the 2nd, and Lynn Lofland, John's wife, was in the 1st. Lynn Lofland was the first graduate of that program. I think Charmaz and I might have been the 2nd and 3rd graduates. I'm not quite sure of that.

When I first arrived there, Strauss was in Europe consulting with the World Health Organization. And so, I took one or two quarters of Barney's analysis course in the program at UCSF [before Strauss returned]. Barney lived in Mill Valley, and I lived at the time in Petaluma, which is quite a bit north of there. At that time, it maybe was a 1/2-hour drive; but now, it is about two hours given the traffic there.

We [Baney Glaser and Odis Simmons] would meet in the parking lot at the Safeway store in Mill Valley and then commute into the city together. And that was always interesting to me because I dropped out of high school. In fact, I still don't have a high school diploma. The high school I dropped out of was right across the street [from the Safeway store in Mill Valley]. I had all these incredible conversations with Barney across the street from the school I dropped out of.

So, we just immediately connected with one another. I had two daughters. He had three daughters, and they were around the same age. Both Barney and my youngest daughters were not only the same age; they had the same name, which was Bonnie. In fact, Barney's Bonnie runs the whole operation [at Sociology Press] now that Barney's passed on.

But we just became very good friends at the time. And our family saw one another socially. We had a huge amount of fun together. Barney had a swimming pool, and we'd go down to his place and the kids would play in the pool. Barney and I would sit there and talk grounded theory all the time. And on our commute, we would talk grounded theory. And on the way home, we would, you know, talk grounded theory. We'd sit in the parking lot in the Safeway store for an hour or hour and a half, talking grounded theory and Barney is fiercely taking notes with these little stubby pencils. I don't know how he could write with those things- and lots of those discussions ended up in his book, *Theoretical Sensitivity*.

It was an adventure learning from Barney because his classes were - I sometimes called them, this may be a little overdoing it kind of, an intellectual riot, you know, very free-flowing. He treated all his students like colleagues, you know, like he didn't talk down to us. He wanted us to help him explore more about grounded theory because, as both Glaser and Strauss, at the time, said, it's really at this point a theory about a methodology because the only time it had been used is during the death and dying research that they were doing at UCSF.

So, Barney and I became lifelong friends. We shared a sense of humor and did a lot of laughing together. I really, really miss the man.

Well, then, when Anselm came back from overseas, there was a party to greet him back. And I went to the party, and I said to Anselm, "Well, I've been really anxious to meet you."

And he said something that I always laugh when people do this. He said, “No, you were eager to meet me.”

And I went, “Oh yeah, that is a more appropriate word, isn't it?”

And so now, when I see people using the word anxious when really eager would fit better, I always chuckle and remember Anselm. But Anselm was just the nicest, sweetest man, just so kind to everyone, so supportive of everyone.

Barney was also very supportive of everyone. Barney was not an institutional man. You know, some of his colleagues would get irritated at him because he wouldn't go to faculty meetings because he just said, “Oh, it's in-presencing[1]. They never do anything.”

He's right about that, you know. But Anselm, he was a real institutional man. He knew the institution; he knew the ins and outs. He was very, very savvy about how to get things done. And I became, and you know, I say this humbly, they both considered me their best student. In fact, I still have a letter that Anselm wrote for me that just almost brings tears to my eyes. It's so supportive.

I had a family with two kids, one an infant. Anselm always made sure that I was first in line for money. We weren't as close friends as Barney and I were, but he frequently invited me over to his house to have lunch with him and his wife, Fran. And we talked about grounded theory. Well, what he thought was grounded theory. And as he's talking, I'm thinking, “He's not talking about grounded theory. He's talking about symbolic interactionism," which I knew quite well. I cut my eye teeth on that. He was a symbolic interactionist.

I'd taken these courses from Barney, and he talked about the importance of suspending preconceptions (and he didn't use the term at the time) but not being constructivist. As I said in my book[2], the term constructivist grounded theory[3] is an oxymoron because Barney is the one

who created grounded theory. The two main contributions of Anselm were that he helped Barney understand the value and importance of meaning-making because that was not so much in Barney's background, but that's what symbolic interaction is all about. It's how people construct meaning to organize and run their lives and so forth. And that's the symbolic interactionist perspective. And Barney certainly, in the work they did together, saw the importance of that which previously I don't know that he'd seen as clearly. And the other contribution from Anselm was that he was a high-status sociologist, well known and still is. He was on the list of who's who in sociology, and Barney was unknown at that time until the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book.

The earliest statement of what became grounded theory was Barney's article in 1965 in the Sociology journal *Social Problems*, which was probably the number three journal in sociology at the time. The article was about the constant comparative method, which became Chapter 5 in the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book. The constant comparative method was authored entirely by Barney. That's the guts and core of grounded theory. That's how grounded theory is non constructivist from the point of view of the researcher.

Now, as I pointed out in my book[4], there are three types of constructivism that you need to consider. One is sort of fundamental constructivism, as one of my early mentors, Stan Lyman put it in a book with Marvin Scott called *A Sociology of the Absurd,* is the symbolic interactionist position that the universe is inherently meaningless. All meaning is a construction of human beings. You can't avoid that. At least if you adopt that perspective, you know, which I clearly do. In other words, there isn't any kind of solid structure of society. Society is the ongoing creation of meaning and the interaction between people and what is around them. So, in that sense, you can't avoid the creation of meaning. Then there's the constructivism of the people you're

studying. That is how they are constructing their lives to work on their major concerns and so forth. Including the issues and problems they're trying to resolve. But what Barney designed out of grounded theory, as a methodology, was the constructivism of the researcher as the theorist. The researcher should be as non-constructivist as humanly possible. It's impossible to be 100% non-constructivist because we use language and meaning.

And that's where Barney and Anselm parted. Anselm didn't really understand that. And Anselm was still a symbolic interactionist to the end. And the first seminar I took from him when he came back from Europe, the first day he started discussing, here are the kinds of dimensions and issues and questions you want to pursue. And I thought that's symbolic interactionism. He was talking about what he later termed axial coding. And that violates the original primary canons of grounded theory as Barney designed it. And I saw this really clearly, and it kind of stunned me, but I didn't want to say anything. I'd just met the guy, you know, and I liked him a lot. He was just wonderful and a very good teacher. He was just an absolutely brilliant man. I absolutely adored him.

And so, on the way home that day after Barney's seminar, I said, “Barney, you and Anselm are not talking about the same thing.” And my statement didn't connect for Barney. You know how you can be talking with somebody, and you both think that you're in the same place as the other and you're not? Because if there's enough similarity, it's easy to believe that that you are talking about the same thing, but you are not. So, it didn't connect in Barney's mind. And he didn't really realize that he and Anselm were not talking about the same thing (i.e. not articulating grounded theory the same way) until the book that Strauss co-authored with Corbin came out[5]. That book really upset him. He was hurt and angry, and he wrote a book in response,

and he sent me that book[6]. He would send me his books and ask what I thought. And I told him what I thought.

What I told him was, "Barney, you got way too much passion in here. And it's going to end up becoming a soap opera if you don't reduce that." He got upset at me, which he hardly ever did. He accused me of siding with Anselm. He eventually calmed down, but he didn't do anything about it. And what happened, it became a soap opera. That's when the so-called "schism" happened. Now the content of *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* is actually quite good. It's very clarifying. But that passion, people see that, and that's what they tend to focus on. And whenever I would point things like that out to Barney, he would say, "Well, they wouldn't make good ground theorists anyway." People thought the schism was personal, but it wasn't. They remained good friends. Even after Anselm died, Barney would visit his wife, who was then in a care facility, and have lunch with her.

A lot of people thought that Strauss was horrible. I remember once I was at a ground theory conference, and one of the participants said, "Oh, Strauss must have been a horrible person." It kind of shocked me. I said, "No, he was a wonderful person." But the conference participant really had believed Strauss was horrible; that he had stolen grounded theory from Glaser. That's just not the way it went down. Barney did some perks from his association with Anselm at the time due to Anselm's high status as a sociologist. And maybe it's still that way, when a higher-status person signs on to the work of somebody else, usually a younger person, who's got fresher ideas and so forth, and the reputation of the higher-status person helps the lesser-status person's career, but the bulk of the work is done by the lesser status person.

Well, that's the case with Glaser and Strauss. Grounded theory is Glaser's ideas at core, what we now call classical grounded theory, which to me is the authentic grounded theory. I am

not saying that Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory and the different versions are bad research. They're just not grounded theory. I mean, they're a nice methodological addition to symbolic interactionism, but they're just not grounded theory because they violate the central canon, which is to be as non-constructivist as humanly possible. And that's why I consider it to be, you know, to consider that to be an oxymoron.

But at any rate, [back to my time at UCSF]. Anselm's classes were very interesting. I learned a huge amount from him. It deepened my understanding and respect for symbolic interactionism. But he didn't really get grounded theory, as Barney said in his retort to Corbin and Strauss's book. Barney said, "Anselm, he never really understood me." And Barney was right. He was absolutely right. I think it's sort of tragic that it took him so long to figure that out. Maybe I should have been a little more assertive about it, but you know, I loved Anselm. It's really hard for me to talk about this because I don't want it to come across as criticizing Anselm.

I've known a lot of really smart people, including Anselm, but Barney was just off the charts in terms of the way he thought. Barney was a creative genius. He was able to put things together in a way that I can't imagine anyone I've ever known being able to do except him. He picked up what he did when he was in the army in Europe, at the Sorbonne, etcetera. The stuff he learned at Columbia about quantitative methods and theory and all of that. He just put it all together into creating grounded theory. I think it's just an absolutely brilliant method that counters the mistakes made by Emil Durkheim, who was the original sociologist at the University of Paris, the Sorbonne. Durkheim was the first actual chair of sociology. He developed a methodology based upon the scientism model of nature and "hard sciences," using the concept of social facts and the idea that some patterns of human conduct and so forth are so concrete you can treat them as if they're things. And that's the biggest difference between the sort

of quantitative view and the positivist view of sociology and the more symbolic interactionist meaning-making view. That's the biggest contrast there.

It was an absolute thrill meeting both Barney and Anselm. I still love them to this day. Barney and I had so much fun together. I loved his family. I still love his family. They're wonderful people. He fundamentally altered my life. It's like my life became very, very different when I met Barney, not just sociologically, methodologically, or theoretically, but in my personal life by serving as an example. So that's my story up to that point, I suppose.

Kara: Well, Odis, it seems like your relationship with Barney, and Anselm for that matter, really gave you a front-row seat in observing the development of grounded theory since 1970. Can you tell us more about how Glaser continued to develop grounded theory over the years?

Odis: Yeah, if you've read his books, he said all is data, and he really meant that. He used the discussions from the original seminars [at UCSF] that I took from him with the other students. During those sessions, Barney would take notes of the discussions and of the things that we spent a lot of time doing, which was processing data, that is, doing analysis. He had a very unique way of teaching. He didn't tell you how to do things. He would put you in a position to have to discover it for yourself, so you owned it. I think it can be a very effective teaching method, but for some people, it is very frustrating and scary. But we got very used to him.

He sometimes was difficult for people to understand because, as I told him, “Barney, you're the only Barney Glaser alive, and you think everybody is as smart as you, and you're wrong. They're not. They don't think like you, initially. Maybe they think like you more as they get to know you and listen to you and understand you.” But I remember after some of the seminars, it was not uncommon for students to come up to me and say, “What did Barney say today?” Because they weren't quite clear.

At Barney's [UCSF] seminars, we did a lot of analyzing data, and we would get data from colleagues and other universities and so forth. And we'd analyze it so that we would get that practice. The whole time Barney's taking notes, that's data to him. The conversations that we had during our commutes, which was data to him. The conversations that we had as our children were playing together, that was data to him.

One of the primary reasons Barney started Sociology Press[7] was that he wanted to talk to the people who were reading his books. He used those discussions as data for the next book because it enabled him to understand what was confusing to people and what more they needed to know. It would give him ideas about growing the method, about elaborating and clarifying it more. That's what he meant by all his data. It truly means that not only just in the research context but in the context of how he dealt with life. And that was one of the many important things I learned from him. Don't be kind of numb to the things that are going on around you because they all mean something that could be valuable to you.

I remember many of my students at Fielding would call to order a book, and he'd answer the phone, and they were, like, wow, he actually answered the phone. But that's the way he did it. He wanted to talk to people to find out why you're buying this book. What's your understanding? What do you want to get out of grounded theory and these kinds of questions? That was data to him, and that's how he grew the method. Then, as his students started doing dissertations, he could see how they were doing it. And that was data for him.

He was always open to ideas. He was always open to the ideas of his students. The people he worked with, he considered colleagues. I remember once, at one of the seminars in Manhattan, New York, I said to him, "Barney, you always treated me like a colleague." And he

went, “Well, you were my colleague.” That's the way he treated me as we're having these conversations across from the high school that I dropped out of.

I look back on all of this, and I go, wow, what an opportunity I had. It all started when I walked into the bookstore, and I said, “That's an interesting title,” and I picked up the *Discovery of Grounded Theory*. That fundamentally altered my life forever, including right now. If that hadn't happened, we wouldn't be doing this right now because you might not know anything about grounded theory.

You know, I love your story about how you went to the introductory session for Fielding, and Tony and I were there talking about grounded theory. You'd never heard of it. So, I think you called home and said, look this up [on the internet]. At that time, we didn't have smartphones. You asked, “Is this a real thing, or did they just make that up?”

You know, I wrote that article about grounded theory entitled “Is that a real theory or did you just make it ?”. The idea for the article was actually based upon the experience of a musician friend of mine who wrote a lot of songs and so forth. We used to go to his gigs, and this woman came up during the break and said, “Is that a real song, or did you just make that up?” My friend was like, “Yeah, it's a real song and I made it up.” What makes a song real? What makes the theory real?

Before Glaser and Strauss came along, it really was that [what made a theory] real was some high-status sociologist who created it. They conjectured it. And one of my favorite phrases of Barney’s is that they created it “without being burdened by data.” It still perplexes me as to how people think that the theory should come before the data. It doesn't make sense to me, not even today. [They make up theory and then test it.] I'm not saying that that form of research is useless. All forms of research create meaning. They create information. They create

understanding. But the one that I've always favored, far and away, is what we now call classic grounded theory. I just think it's the best approach.

One of the enormously satisfying parts of my life has been teaching grounded theory to so many other people like you and then seeing what you're doing with it. It is just absolutely fascinating to me. It's very rewarding, as was using classic grounded theory in my other professions as a therapist and counselor, and so forth.

Classic grounded theory is not just useful in an academic context. It's useful in your whole life. Just simple things that I learned from Barney, like if you want to understand why people are behaving that way, ask the questions, "What are they working on? What is the issue or problem they are processing or that they're trying to solve?" And that's an incredibly valuable question. And it's so simple. Another one was, when I was doing my dissertation in the field of alcoholism, I was interviewing the patients at Laguna Honda Hospital in San Francisco. The patients were just BS'ing me, and I told Barney, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to collect data there. These people won't be straight with me." And he just said, "Make your problem your topic. Why are they doing it? They're doing it for a reason. Find out why, that's what they're working on." And that just opened up my whole dissertation from his statement, "Just make your problem your topic. What are they working on?" Those two questions can be really powerful. Barney had a way of getting at the core of things.

Barney was always coding everything. I would have conversations with Barney, and we would just be having a conversation. He would be coding it. I would be like, "Do we have to code everything?" He was always coding, and then he'd say, "OK, what's the core variable?" I couldn't think as fast as him, and I said, "I don't know." He'd say what it was, and I'd go, "Oh wow." His core variable would get at the core of things. His mind was like no one else's.

So, back to your question about how Barney continued to develop grounded theory over the years. I think the shorter answer to your question is that he saw everything as data, and he used that data to elaborate and refine what grounded theory is. He didn't just make it up, which was kind of the tradition of the big sociologists, like one of his professors, Robert K. Merton. You know, they just made up their theories out of their own sort of personal genius.

By the way, when I was introduced to sociology before I found the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book, I thought, "I'm not smart enough to do that. I can never do that." And that's why when I picked up the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book and started reading it, I thought, "I can do that. I can figure that out because it's got some guidelines." The *Discovery of Grounded Theory* book was really more about why to do it than how to do it.

It was *Theoretical Sensitivity*[8] that really told you how to do grounded theory. To me, that's the core book, that book and *Doing Grounded Theory*[9]. That's where Barney really laid out the constant comparative method in enough detail for people to be able to follow grounded theory.

Another thing I would say about the difference between Anselm and Barney is that Anselm saw grounded theory as one form of qualitative analysis, along with many other forms. Barney saw grounded theory as a full methodology, and that's what he outlined in the *Theoretical Sensitivity* book.

Kara: Can you tell us a little bit more about the difference between grounded theory being a method versus it being a methodology?

Odis: Well, a method is something that's focused on one task. A methodology is the whole thing. It is how you collect the data, how you analyze the data, how you write up the data, and so forth. It's the full ball of wax, so to speak. Whereas the method is the constant comparative method. It's

not the constant comparative methodology. It's the data analysis method that is used in the methodology of grounded theory.

But there are also things about collecting data. All is data, but some data is actually more useful than others. If you're doing open interviews, which most people do because it's a richer form of data, you start with a grand tour question. This isn't specifically a grounded theory term, but it's used in grounded theory. A grand tour question just gets people talking about the subject. I've certainly learned a lot about people by using a grand tour question.

In fact, I used it in counseling and therapy practice, and it was powerful because people would come in, and we had to fill out all these forms beforehand, where you [the practitioner] are supposed to diagnose people. But I always started out with a grand tour question, like, “To what do I owe the honor of this visit?” Let them talk about it and see where it goes. When I started my anger management program, which was based upon the ideas of grounded theory, what I call grounded action. I started that by saying, “This is a new program. I've never done this before. How would you do it?” And I took it from there rather than coming in with some sort of preconceived model, as it was very common at the time and is still common, unfortunately. And it completely misses the boat about what people are working on. And, when you connect with what people are working on. [Using a grand tour question] they're more apt to trust you. They're more apt to be open to you.

Kara: You and I have previously discussed one area where Barney made a shift in his original conceptualization of substantive theory. So, can you tell us more about it? You saw this shift happen firsthand.

Odis: Yeah. Anselm, Barney, and I were sociologists. Our interests were in advancing sociological theory since we were working within the field of sociology. And I always joke with people, if you're doing grounded theory, you're a sociologist whether you like it or not.

The focus [of the research and emerging theory] was on the core variable[10], not on the substantive area[11]. So, Barney encouraged us to go to different substantive areas to see how that core variable worked out because you're going to find variations around that core in these different areas[12]. So, the focus wasn't on the substantive field; it was on that more abstract level[13]. And that's the way I learned it. I still like that way because, as a sociologist, the motivating question of sociology is what makes society work.

I had a fantasy for a long time to write a theory of society. But I am too old to do it now. I would die long before I finished it because it would be like a lifetime's work. But, I can kind of see a theory of society as being the most fundamental core variables [that have been developed across various grounded theories] and how they play out universally [in relationship to each other], you know, because a good core variable is really pretty universal. For example, Barney and I discussed what Barney called fortressing. You know, a fence is a fortress, a prison is a fortress, a bank is a fortress. It's meant to keep people in and keep people out. A bank is meant to keep people out. Your fence is meant to keep neighborhood dogs out of your yard and your neighbors from encroaching and so forth. In Western societies fortressing is pretty universal.

Another example of a more universal core variable is from my original study of milkmen, and the core variable that I discovered was what I called cultivating relationships. You find it isn't just milkmen that cultivate relationships. It's pretty endemic to the way that people operate their lives and so forth. But core variables are things that are, if not universal, certainly very

widespread through more than just this culture, and that's the sort of thing that sociologists are interested in.

Well, Barney came up with the idea that he was going to try to do what he ended up calling problem-solving seminars[14]. When he put the first one out on his website, there were only a couple of people signed up for it and he was going to cancel it. So, I pulled together a group of Fielding students and got them to sign up. And so, the seminars happened. Otherwise, there would be a lot of people today who would not have had that option. Grounded theory would have shrunk. I mean, it wouldn't have grown the way it did through Barney's seminars because so many of the people around the world who are grounded theorists learned it from Barney at those seminars.

Kara: So, it was through those seminars that there was a shift in the conceptualization of substantive theory.

Odis: Yeah, because what happened was the people who began signing up for those seminars were people in the applied professions, social work, education, and the medical field, particularly a lot of nurses working on PhD's in nursing because [the original program at UCSF was in the nursing school]. These professionals have a different focus. They came in, they were doing a dissertation in a specific field, and they wanted to use their dissertation in their field. And that's when Barney began to focus more on the substantive level[15], then on the just pure methodology level and so forth. And that's when some of the nomenclature changed.

Now, I think I taught you [Odis was referring to me, the interviewer, personally] the more the original version of the core variable being the main focus, and the substantive area being considerably less focus. [In the original version], if you want to find variations, you go to different places [different substantive areas], because the core category is going to be handled

differently, and that feeds your data about that core variable at a more abstract level. Well, Glaser shifted that focus because he was dealing with the data in front of him, which is what the people [at the troubleshooting seminars] wanted to do which was create theory in a more substantive way. And that's where that shift came from. He followed that data [from what the attendees at the troubleshooting seminars wanted].

Kara: So, the later grounded theories focused more on a substantive theory related to the substantive field, the setting, and the people from [the original setting]?

Odis: Yeah, and how that main concern led to the understanding of what the core was and how that played out within that profession within that context. So, it was more context-oriented than abstract theory-oriented. This shows that the method can be used in more than one way. It still works very, very nicely on that more abstract level. The nice thing about the more abstract substantive theory is that it's so easy to see how it applies elsewhere.

The example I always give is Judith Lee Kissel's study of doing time in prisons and how that applies to a long airline flight, a boring classroom, or a boring job. You know that the same conditions are there, and the response is very, very similar. I used to always say that grounded theory is movable over space and time. You can put it at that more abstract level, but you can stay on that much more substantive level. And that's how most people, the people who went to Barney seminars, that's how they learned it. And so, you know, I know both ways.

Kara: Well, thank you, Odis. I think that many people aren't aware of that shift because I don't think that Glaser ever expressly wrote about that shift occurring. He made the shift, but he never actually wrote about that shift and why that shift occurred. And so, I think many people aren't aware of that shift.

Odis: Well, it also changed the nomenclature a little bit too, which can be confusing for people. Well, why does he use this here and use that there? Why? Well, the reason is that shift. I'm not even sure if he was fully aware of how much he had shifted because he was focusing on today, not yesterday. He was focusing right now. That's the data that he was responding to.

Kara: Well, it's interesting. We now refer to grounded theory as classic grounded theory and a lot has been written about that original version that was originally published in 1965 and 1967. It's how Glaser originally developed it. And yet what you're showing us here is that Glaser responded to all his data, like all of the feedback that he was getting from people that were using it [the grounded theory methodology]. The method was alive, it grew, it developed over a period, over the period of his lifetime. It wasn't static. While we call it classic grounded theory, I'm starting to use Glaserian, now that he's passed away, to capture [the dynamic methodology that he developed over his lifetime]. I know that when he was alive, he didn't like the use of Glaserian.

Odis: Yeah, he said it was too personal.

Kara: Right, but [using Glaserian] links it to him. It links it by saying this was the version he created and that it wasn't fixed in time. It developed over time and in response to the people who were using the method.

Odis: Yeah. There's a sort of tragic element to this, which is, I know from very early, first-hand experience, grounded theory is Glaser's [creation].

Kara: I just want to thank you so much for the conversation and for being willing to have this discussion about the history of grounded theory over the last 60 years and your experience with it. I do want to put a plug for your book. Can you tell us the name of your book?

Odis: *Experiencing Grounded Theory*

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For all inquiries, contact kvanderlinden@mentoringresearcher.org.